

WASHINGTON -- U.S. Rep. Spencer Bachus (R-AL) says a report released today by a House subcommittee calling for a suspension of the Defense Department's anthrax vaccination program gives a major boost to legislation he is pushing to end the mandatory vaccinations until they're proven safe and to require informed consent of troops before they are given the shots.

"The men and women who serve in our armed forces are willing to sacrifice their lives in defense of this nation. The least we can do for them is ensure that safety questions about the vaccine have been answered first," said Bachus, who called for congressional hearings of the anthrax vaccination program last November.

The House Government Reform Committee's National Security Subcommittee issued a report today that is sharply critical of the Defense Department vaccine program. In addition to suspending the program, the report calls for gaining the informed consent of troops before they are given the shots

"We shouldn't treat the military like guinea pigs. They need to know what they're being asked to take and why, and about the potential side effects," said Bachus. In January, Bachus introduced legislation requiring the informed consent of military personnel before they are given drugs that have not been fully tested and approved for use.

"No one in the military should be given a vaccine or any drug until they are also given the facts about it. We need to remember that after military service, the uniform can come off, but any ill effects from a non-FDA approved vaccine stay with you for life. This report today will only help the cause of passing legislation to protect our troops," said Bachus.

In addition to his bill requiring informed consent, Bachus is co-sponsoring two bills that address the anthrax vaccine issue. One ends the vaccine program until an independent study by the National Institutes of Health is conducted on both the safety and effectiveness of the vaccine and another study by the General Accounting Office is completed on the effect the program is having on moral, recruitment and retention. The second bill Bachus is co-sponsoring makes the vaccine program voluntary until further research on the vaccine's safety has been conducted.